Chapter 6

Adolescence, Marriage, and Sex

[1] THE problems of adolescence are very different for boys and girls. One of the most marked differences is the greater prolongation of the period for boys. Neither sex has any clearly or socially recognized crisis rites to demarcate the passage from childhood to adulthood. It is basically an individual and personal transition that must be made. There are no men's clubs, no secret societies, no tribal initiation for boys. For girls there are absolutely no first menses ceremonies or even restrictions.

The closest approach to a symbolic recognition of adulthood offered by the society is tattooing for girls, letting the hair grow long for boys, and tooth blackening and filing for both sexes. But even these devices are passed and optional, so that the initiative must be taken by the adolescent himself. They are not utilized to further the young person's education or alter his status.

TATTOOING FOR GIRLS

[2] [2.5] The time for girls to be tattooed is on the first day of the four-day communal pig hunt at the end of the dry season, when most of the boys and men leave the village. There is no implied sex segregation in the choice of this time, since any man who has failed to go hunting may be present during the tattooing process. In fact, men also may be tattooed, but this is done casually by some friend at any time during the year, and later in young manhood. Tattooing is never among men than among women. Almost all women are tattooed, whereas only an occasional man is.

The men set off for the hunt shortly after dawn, accompanied by a group of women who may not go beyond the crest of the hill. The women then return and are required to be quiet and avoid unduly vigorous activity until the men come back. Girls whose breasts are beginning to develop take this opportunity to be tattooed, but they must wait until a black column of smoke rises from the grass fired by the men for the pig drive. If they do not wait, the tattoo designs will be light and inconspicuous. Each girl herself expresses the wish and collects the necessary materials. These are a sharp and finely pointed cocoanut-shell charcoal mixed with the juice of banana bark. Some grown woman who feels that she has a certain skill in the matter will volunteer to perform the operation. The girl lays her head in the operator's lap, a

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OFS Alor OFS

design is first traced on her forehead or cheek and is then pricked in with a thorn dipped in charcoal. The procedure usually draws a number of girls and adult women, all of whom discuss animatedly which of a limited number of simple designs will be used. Often a little girl who has taken no initiative in the matter will be urged by a friend or adult to undergo the operation. Beauty is the only objective.

It is a tradition to insist that the operation does not hurt, and when asked a girl who had just had the task completed whether it was painful, older women answered before she was able to, assuring me that it was not. On one occasion some older women, by way of teasing the child's grandmother, urged a little girl of seven to let herself be tattooed. The grandmother arrived just in time to prevent the scheme from being carried out. She was very indignant that her grandchild should have been enjoled into it when she was obviously so young. In relation to a discussion of skills and craftsmanship which will come later, it should be noted that the tattooing process is often very crude and usually impermanent, so that traces of designs are rarely distinguishable on the faces of middle-aged women.

GROWING UP FOR BOYS

Whereas girls are tattooed from approximately ten to fourteen, the comparable badge of adulthood for boys, i.e., long hair, does not come until somewhat later, at ages I should estimate from sixteen to eighteen. When boys begin to let their hair grow long, they also begin borrowing or acquiring male accouterments. These are dwelt upon in loving detail in many myths and consist of a sword, a front shield, a back shield, a parrying shield, a bow, a wide belt of woven cotton that serves as a quiver, an arrow basket with bells, and the tubular, arrow-bark hair cylinder with the accompanying combs and head plumes. Naturally, a young man rarely succeeds in borrowing or acquiring all these articles at first, but he gets as many as he can and struts about in them, often followed by the half-admiring, half-derisive comments of older women and girls. There is a special expression for the type of laughter that women direct toward a young man, which I can translate only by our word *hoot*. Its character is as unmistakable as the laughter that accompanies the telling of smutty jokes in our culture. A young man of about twenty himself described in the following words this attitude and the associated courting interests of both boys and girls.

"When a lot of women get together to work in the fields or to fetch water, they talk and talk. When you hear them hoot, that means they are talking about a man. Maybe one girl says she likes a certain man and [illegible] to *sleep* with *him*.

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

ing instance. Langmai, who was courting Kolmani by helping her with the storage of her harvest, suggested that they had better marry, by saying, "Who will eat this corn I am stacking? I had better come and eat it myself."

TOOTH BLACKENING

It is during this period of adolescence that both boys and girls have their teeth blackened and filed. Again the matter is optional, but since shiny black teeth are much admired and long uneven ones are considered very ugly, practically every young person has his blackened and probably half have them filed. The process is more or less in the nature of a prolonged picnic, free from adult supervision. It is without doubt also a period of license for many of the young people, although adults vigorously contradicted my phrasing it so.

The best indication of the sexual liberty current at this time is that neither parents forbid their daughters to remain in remote field houses overnight and insist upon their staying at home or near by in the house of some responsible older kin. Further, when I visited such a group one evening at sundown just as the strips of dye were being passed out, the young man in charge of procuring and mixing the paste used to darken the teeth said merrily to the children, "Now, no intercourse tonight!"—a comment that produced a ripple of giggling among the boys and girls.

The actual procedure is as follows: In July or August some young unmarried man, perhaps in his early twenties, announces that he will blacken teeth for the children of the community and designates the field house where it will be done. This is the slack season agriculturally, so that girls can be spared from the fields. He purchases from some friend in the village of Bakundarang a particular type of soil found there. This investment rarely exceeds five cents. With the earth he mixes a fruit resembling a small green fig. The resulting paste is smeared on a strip of banana bark which each child cuts to fit the size of his mouth. The preparation of each day's supply takes the better part of an afternoon. For at least seven nights, and often ten, the children sleep together in a field house, with the paste held against their teeth by the flexible bark strips. During the day boys assiduously hunt rats, and girls go to their fields to collect vegetable foods. The children all eat together, being careful to place small bits of food far back in their mouths in order not to spoil the dye. With the same objective a length of thin bamboo is used as a drinking tube during the period. Surplus rats are smoked to preserve them for a feast on the last day.

The whole procedure reminds one very much of "playing house." It is a carefree time for all the young people. There are no taboos sur-

851 There are no taboos associated with the period except that attending a dance will interfere with
[784] proper dyeing and that if small children loiter too near the older group they will fail to grow up rapidly. For his services the young man is paid a nominal sum of an arrow, or nowadays a penny, per child. He seldom makes more than twenty or thirty cents for a week's work. When I asked why a young man undertook such a task when the reward was so small, the answer was, "Because he likes to be near young girls."

804 On the last day or two of the period those who are to have their
[77] teeth filed go through the ordeal. The same person who prepared the dye usually does the tooth filing. The subject's head is laid on the thigh of the operator and wedged against his side with his elbow. The jaws are propped open with a piece of cornscob. The six upper and six lower
[842] front teeth are then filed to half their length with an ordinary knife blade which has been nicked to resemble a saw. Apparently experience makes it possible to avoid the root canal, which occupies only the upper half of the incisors. The whole operation takes about two or three
[837] hours, and for this the operator is paid the equivalent of about five cents. It is undoubtedly painful but, as in tattooing, it is bad form to admit it. The result of this filing means that even when the back teeth
[832] are occluded, the tongue will show pinkly between the gaping front teeth when a person smiles. This is considered definitely attractive.

The complete informality of this ceremony is manifest by the fact that some of the young people return two or three years in succession if the first attempt at blackening was not successful. Also, anyone, at any time, may have his teeth filed down to a straight, even line for appearance's sake. The range of ages is also wide. Boys may be from about fourteen to twenty and girls from twelve to eighteen. There is no regulation against young married people joining the group. The married people, however, are most likely to be girls, since marriage comes early for them.

Tattooing, the beginning of masculine vanity, courting, and teeth blackening are all preliminaries to marriage for young people. It will be necessary now to describe the financial elaborations involved in marriage for the young Atimelangers, how they enter into such relationships, and what some of the associated sex attitudes and practices are.

STRUCTURE OF MARRIAGE FINANCE

583 Marriage has as one of its major functions the establishment of a series of exchanges between groups of extended affinal kin which will continue as long as the marriage lasts. There are three major types of

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OFS Alor OFS

tion. Both ties are within the range of possibility but do not appear to be modal.

One of the interesting aspects of early married life in Atimelang is that the woman, once mutual residence has been established, quite often refuses her husband sexual privileges. This refusal is often phrased in terms of still unsatisfactory financial payments to her kinsmen, so that men have another opportunity to link wealth with sex and sexual frustration. However, if we may trust the autobiographies, men may also on occasion show considerable reluctance to enter into sexual relationships. Rilpada's and Malelaka's autobiographies both point to such episodes. In consonance with such an attitude is the fact that upper men when engaged in elaborate feast finances are continent and even sleep in the male guesthouses or on their own verandahs. The acquisition of wealth can be pursued successfully only at the expense of sexual gratification. It should be stated parenthetically that some women, as well as their husbands, believe that they are lucky rather than unlucky in relation to "pulling in gongs and moiras," so that continence is not required of their husbands to ensure success in financial transactions.

On the part of women the unwillingness to enter immediately into sexual intimacies with their husbands, or at least the existence of that traditional attitude, may be explicable in part by the very early marriages they frequently contract. The first sign of swelling breasts is considered the token of a girl's readiness for adult sexual life. First menses are considered irrelevant, and some women take me of having borne children before their periods set in.* Not every girl, of course, marries so young, but there is no doubt that marriage does come much earlier in life for girls than for boys. This means that their period of sociological adolescence is much briefer and certainly in comparison to boys socially much less trying.

The attitude of men toward young wives varies considerably, although again opinion is weighted in favor of young women. Of course the matter is relative. In the case of Ameneu, previously cited, his overt objection was that the girl was too young to enter into sexual relations. The chief of Atimelang, who then bought the girl, said that it was better to get a very young girl so that she could be trained to docility and industry. A man from Dikimpe was very dubious of the whole affair and said somewhat scornfully that in his village they did not believe in marrying children. Rilpada, whose autobiography is included in this volume, was of the opinion that an older woman, who thought only of her fields and had already learned to work, was more desirable as a

* The consequence is treated in an equally casual manner.

2: DuBois E-5 (1938-1939) 1941 OFS Alor OFS

source of food. The rats are often roasted on the spot, and the children are given the kidneys, entrails, and other less choice portions of the kill. In any event the day's food is so promptly and inconsiderately procured as discipline is circumvented. Further, the food secured is the less choice kind which may, in conjunction with many other stimulus, help to produce in the child, the feeling of being undervalued. 155 854 855

As compared with this free play group period for boys, there is a slightly different adjustment for girls. Their play period is neither so long nor so free. They are more closely socialized to their mothers, have more rigorous training in their adult role as providers for the family. They go out to work in the fields with their mothers and have therefor more regular access to food. I know of no cases in which little girls have been accused of pilfering from gardens, whereas such charges give rise to frequent if minor frictions with boys. On the other hand a girl does not have the great privilege of the small boy. She gets no jubilee during housecleaning unless an unusually indulgent and thoughtful male kin happens to notice her on the edge of the group and gives her a bit of corn. Similarly, the meat at feasts is always distributed to the women but only in terms of the males in their households. That is, women get meat for their husbands and sons, but not for themselves or their daughters. Since food is taken home and eaten there, the women naturally get a share, but only as dependents of men. Also, since meat is eaten only in connection with a feast and is definitely a "treat," it becomes set in the children's minds as a symbol of masculine prestige. This coincides with theories of property which grant men the ownership of all foods [illegible] as opposed to women who own the vegetable foods. The system of meat distribution at feasts helps to reinforce early in life and on a very basic level the role of masculine prestige in the culture. It is not that men are the providers; in fact they are quite the contrary. They are the ones provided for; but they are the purveyors of a delicacy. 155 854 855 562 [illegible] [illegible]

The girl, then is not during the preadolescent years in the essential and intimate relationship to the food cycle which she will follow all her life. Further, she has more opportunity and obligation training than boys in the role of adult economics. There is no sharp break in her life except the change of residence at marriage. It is significant that only after marriage is she allowed to make, independently of her mother, a food contribution to a feast. Public food contributions are the symbol of female adulthood. 155 562 86 [illegible]

Boys find themselves undervalued in comparison to men. Girls are valued in much the same terms as the adult women. Their role will always be somewhat underprivileged, but at least they do not experience the same marked discrepancy between childhood and the adult role expected of them as the boys do. The adolescent boy has a sudden adjustment to make and there are no crisis rites, no initiation ceremonies to help him. His change is not institutionalized or dramatized, and certainly he gets no direct education in it. At about fifteen he begins to practice the purchase of a wife and then seems entering upon the whole complex financial game which is the men's chief labor and heaviest investment. In the course of a few months he drifts away from the play groups, becomes a much more solitary figure, and interestingly enough often remains at this time on a middling meal, even if he must cook for himself. 155 562 [illegible]